

Adjective Preposing in Noun Phrases

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Adjective Preposing in Noun Phrases*

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0. Introduction

Most English adjectives, when followed by their complements or adjuncts, modify noun phrases in the postnominal positions.

- (1) a. a boy content with his lot
- b. a man aware of his mistakes
- c. a book yellow with age

(Otsuka 1969: 67)

They cannot be separated from their complements or adjuncts and modify nouns in the prenominal positions.

- (2) a. *a content boy with his lot
- b. *an aware man of his mistakes
- c. *a yellow book with age

(Otsuka 1969: 67)

However, as is shown in the following examples, there are some adjectives which can be "preposed" and modify nouns in the prenominal positions.

- (3) a. a similar proposition to this
- b. an analogous property to these
- c. a different class from what we expected

(Otsuka 1969: 68)

The adjectives in (3) have the inherent property of "comparison" in common. Otsuka (1969) claims that the preposing of these types of adjectives is parallel with that of adjectives in comparative constructions.

- (4) a. a faster car than a Land-Rover
- b. more attractive a woman than Annie
- c. as comfortable a car as yours

(Otsuka 1969: 69)

However, there exist some adjectives which, though not having the property of "comparison" inherently, are allowed to

be preposed.¹

- (5) a. an easy man to please
 b. a slow man to react
 c. a foolish man to have invited such a coward
 d. a pretty girl to look at

Unlike the adjectives in (5), the adjectives in the following examples cannot be preposed though both types of adjectives are apparently similar in that they take to-infinitives.²

- (6) a. *an eager man to go
 b. *a happy man to be here
 c. *an able man to do the job

This paper aims to find out a principle which governs the preposability of adjectives. Why can the adjectives in (5) be preposed, as contrasted with those in (6)? In the next section, we will survey the previous analyses proposed by Lasnik & Fiengo (1974) and Berman (1974) and show their inadequacies.

1. Previous Analyses

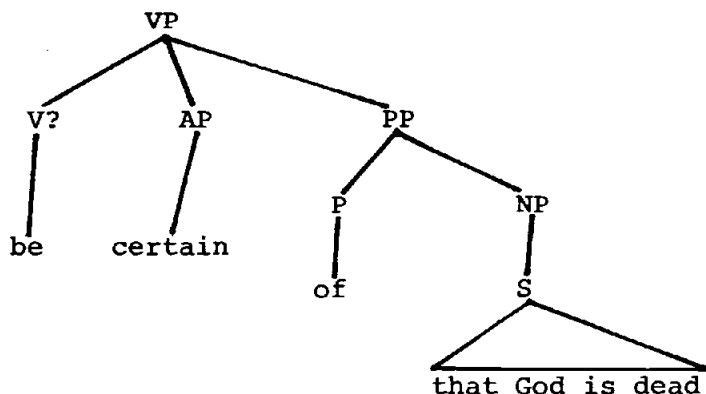
1.1. Lasnik & Fiengo's (1974) Analysis

Lasnik & Fiengo (1974) notice the parallelism between the subcategorization for the verb call and the preposability of adjectives.

- (7) a. I call Mary $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} [\alpha \text{ easy to please}] \\ [\alpha \text{ pretty to look at}] \\ [\alpha \text{ too smart to fool}] \end{array} \right\} .$
 b. Mary is $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{an easy woman to please} \\ \text{a pretty woman to look at} \\ \text{too smart a woman to fool} \end{array} \right\} .$
- (8) a. *I call John $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} [\text{certain that God is dead}] \\ [\text{proud of his children}] \\ [\text{eager for the world to end}] \end{array} \right\} .$
 b. *John is $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{a certain man that God is dead} \\ \text{a proud man of his children} \\ \text{an eager man for the world to end} \end{array} \right\} .$

The verb call has a subcategorization feature [+__NP AP], and therefore, α in (7a) is considered an AP. On the other hand, since sentences (8a) are unacceptable, Lasnik & Fiengo (1974) claim that β in (8a) is not an AP but the strings in β , for example, certain that God is dead, have the following structure:³

(9)



Now compare (7b) and (8b). Sentences (7b) are derived by generating APs, for example, easy to please, in the prenominal positions and then moving the to-infinitives by the rule of Extraposition. On the other hand, according to Lasnik & Fiengo (1974), since β in (8a) is not an AP, it cannot be generated in the prenominal position. Thus sentences (8b) cannot be derived.

Their conclusion, however, has some problems. First, from the viewpoint of X-bar theory, it is very clumsy, because only the adjectives which take "logical objects" (e.g. certain, proud, eager) have a different status from that of other syntactic categories (i.e. N, V, P). This is an undesirable situation. Second, it cannot account for the contrast between the following examples.

- (10) a. I called John [α kind to lend me so much money].
 b. *I called John [β happy to be here].

Both kind and happy do not take logical objects, but there is a difference in acceptability.⁴ If we follow Lasnik & Fiengo's (1974) argument, α in (10a) should be an AP and β in (10b) should not be, and the same structure as (9) should be assigned to β in (10b) as well, though happy does not take a logical object.

Then, what kind of adjectives have this structure? We will lose a syntactic criterion on this, if we insist on claiming that the adjective happy, which does not take a logical object, has the same structure as (9). For the same syntactic structure is assigned both to the adjectives which take logical objects and to some of the adjectives which do not take logical objects (e.g. happy). Thus, whether or not an adjective takes a logical object is not crucial to the selection of a structure like (9) and there is no clear-cut one-to-one correspondence between the syntactic structure and the selection of a logical object. Therefore, it is doubtful whether adjectives as in (8), together with their logical objects, do have structures like (9).⁵ Finally, Lasnik & Fiengo (1974) incorrectly predict that the following sentence is unacceptable, if we assume that find has a subcategorization feature [+__NP AP].

(11) We found Bill proud of his new horse.

1.2. Berman's (1974) Analysis

Berman (1974) accounts for the contrast between (12a) and (12b) syntactically.

- (12) a. an unlikely man ____ to be living in Paris
 b. *an unpleasant man ____ to be living in Paris

She assumes that (12a) and (12b) have the following structures (13a) and (13b) respectively as their underlying representations.

- (13) a. [_{NP} a [_N [_S [_S for man to be living in Paris]
 [_{AP} unlikely]] [_N man]]]
 b. [_{NP} a [_N [_S [_S for man to be living in Paris]
 [_{AP} unpleasant for man]] [_N man]]]

(12a) is derived from (13a) by deleting for man in the embedded sentence under the identity with the head noun man and extraposing the to-infinitive to be living in Paris. On the other hand, since (12b) is unacceptable, it should not be derived from the underlying structure (13b). Berman (1974) posits a special

condition on the deletion rule. The condition is that the immediate arguments of adjectives cannot be deleted. In (13b), while for man in the embedded sentence can be deleted in the same way as in (13a), an immediate argument of unpleasant, namely, for man, cannot be deleted under the condition mentioned just above. Thus (12b) is not derived. Moreover the unacceptability of the following example can be correctly predicted.

- (14) a. *an eager man to go
 b. [_{NP} a [_N [_S man [_{AP} eager [_S for man to go]]]
 [_N man]]]

According to Berman (1974), (14a) has structure (14b) as the underlying representation. In (14b), for man in the embedded sentence can be deleted, but man, which is an immediate argument of eager, cannot be deleted.⁶ Thus (14a) is unacceptable.

Her proposal, however, incorrectly predicts that the following examples are unacceptable.

- (15) a. a slow man to react
 b. [_{NP} a [_N [_S man [_{AP} slow [_S PRO to react]]][_N man]]]
 (16) a. a pretty girl to look at
 b. [_{NP} a [_N [_S girl [_{AP} pretty [_S to look at]]]
 [_N girl]]]

In (15b) and (16b), man and girl are the immediate arguments of slow and pretty respectively. Thus they cannot be deleted under the condition above, and both (15a) and (16a) should be unacceptable, which is contrary to the fact.

2. An Alternative Analysis

Now let us consider (5) and (6), repeated here as (17) and (18), from another point of view.

- (17) (= (5)) a. an easy man to please
 b. a slow man to react
 c. a foolish man to have invited such a coward
 d. a pretty girl to look at

- (18) (= (6)) a. *an eager man to go
 b. *a happy man to be here
 c. *an able man to do the job

What property do the adjectives in (18) share in common, as distinct from the adjectives in (17)? Interestingly enough, we notice a difference in the semantic connectedness among the adjectives, the to-infinitives and the modified noun phrases. The adjectives of the type found in (18), combined with the to-infinitives, modify the noun phrases in the postnominal positions semantically.⁷

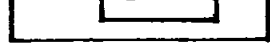
- (19) a. a man eager to go
 └───┬───┘
 └───┘
 b. a man happy to be here
 └───┬───┘
 └───┘
 c. a man able to do the job
 └───┬───┘
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On the other hand, the adjectives of the type found in (17) do not have such a semantic connection with the to-infinitives and the noun phrases. First let us see the semantic connectedness of easy and slow. As distinct from sentences with eager, happy and able (i.e. John is eager to go), sentences (20) below with easy and slow can be paraphrased as (21).

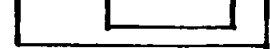
- (20) a. John is easy to please.
 b. John is slow to react.
 (21) a. To please John is easy.
 b. John's reaction is slow.

Adjectives like easy and slow are "directly" connected with "action", which is expressed in the to-infinitives, while, as can be seen from the paraphrases just above, they have only "indirect" semantic connection with their subjects John in (20). From this, we can represent the semantic connectedness of easy and slow as follows:

(22) a. a man easy to please



b. a man slow to react

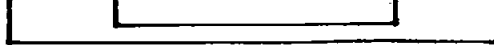


Sentence (23a) with the adjective foolish can be paraphrased as (23b), and therefore, we can represent the semantic connectedness of foolish as (24).

(23) a. John is foolish to have invited such a coward.

b. For John to have invited such a coward is foolish (of him).

(24) a man foolish to have invited such a coward



The adjective pretty has the following semantic connection with to look at and a girl.

(25) a girl pretty to look at



Now let us summarize. The adjectives of the type found in (18), combined with the to-infinitives, modify the noun phrases in the postnominal positions semantically, and they cannot be preposed in the prenominal positions. On the other hand, the adjectives of the type found in (17) do not have such a semantic connection with the to-infinitives and the noun phrases, but there is a "direct" semantic connection between the to-infinitives and the noun phrases. We can schematize this difference as follows:

(26) a. NP A Comp⁸ → A-preposing OK



b. NP A Comp → A-preposing X



Interestingly enough, other movement phenomena can be found which are controlled by a semantic connectedness similar to (26).

(27) a. John painted the house red.

b. John painted red the house which was built by the carpenter.


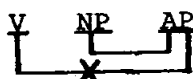
c. a red-painted house

(28) a. John ate the meat raw.

b. *John ate raw the meat which I gave to him yesterday.

c. *raw-eaten meat

In (27a), we have a resultative reading, and the adjective red is semantically closely connected with the verb paint. In this case, Heavy NP Shift can apply as in (27b) and the verbal compound can be formed as in (27c). Thus the adjective red can be in a position adjacent to the verb paint. In (28a), however, the adjective raw modifies the noun phrase the meat and no semantic connection exists between the verb eat and the adjective raw. And in this case, neither Heavy NP Shift nor the rule of verbal compound formation can be applied as in (28b, c). Hence the adjective raw cannot be in a position adjacent to the verb eat. We can schematize this difference as follows:⁹

(29)		Heavy NP Shift	verbal compound ¹⁰
a.	 <p>(resultative)</p>	OK	OK
b.		X	X

Now let us see the parallelism between (26) and (29) and consider why the condition on A-preposing can be described as in (26). In (26a), NP is semantically closely connected with Comp. Thus it can be expected that, in parallel with (29a), NP can be in a position adjacent to Comp in (26a).¹¹ But, if NP is moved in a position adjacent to Comp in (26a), the "NP A Comp" structure is changed into the "A NP Comp" structure, which cannot

be permitted in English. Alternatively, if A is preposed in the prenominal position, the "NP A Comp" structure is changed as follows:

(30) NP A Comp \longrightarrow [_{NP} Spec A N] Comp

The structure after A-preposing is allowed in English, and in this structure, NP is adjacent to Comp. Hence the parallelism between (26a) and (29a). Both of them say that semantically connected elements can adjoin syntactically (Comp and NP in (26a), and V and AP in (29a)). And we can see why A can be preposed when NP is semantically connected with Comp. On the other hand, in (26b), NP has no direct semantic connection with Comp. And in (29b), AP has no direct semantic connection with V. Therefore, we can expect that NP cannot be in a position adjacent to Comp and that A cannot be preposed in the prenominal position. As is shown in (26b), the situation meets our expectations. What is important here is that we have explained the phenomenon of A-preposing not by an ad hoc device but by an independently motivated principle, namely, the principle of "semantic connectedness". Thus, our proposal is not only descriptively adequate but also explanatorily desirable.

3. Conclusion

We have argued that the phenomenon of A-preposing can be explained in terms of "semantic connectedness". In the "NP A Comp" structure, if NP is semantically closely connected with Comp, A can be preposed in the prenominal position, and if not, it cannot be. Furthermore, we have seen that the principle of "semantic connectedness" can be invoked for other movement phenomena as well.

Finally, let us consider the examples of "comparison" and "degree". The adjective easy, which can be preposed in NP, can be wh-moved in S as well.

(31) How easy was the book to read? (Nanni 1978: 6)

However, adjectives such as happy and angry, which cannot be preposed in NP, can also be wh-moved in S.

- (32) a. How happy is John doing that kind of work?
 b. How angry did John seem at Bill?

(Hendrick 1978: 263)

Moreover, these types of adjectives, for example, busy and proud, together with degree words such as so and very, can be moved in S.

- (33) a. So busy have I been with my work since April 1
 that I feel exhausted now.
 b. Very proud though you might think I was of my son when he came back with a fortune, I was in fact rather disappointed.

(Yagi 1977: 228)

Thus, it appears that a distinction should be made between the preposing in NP and the movement in S, but in fact, it need not be, because the adjectives which cannot be preposed alone in NP can be preposed together with degree words.

- (34) a. the boy anxious to go
 b. *the anxious boy to go

(Otsuka 1969: 71)

- (35) a. the boy more anxious to go than John
 b. the more anxious boy to go than John

(Otsuka 1969: 72)

Examples (31)-(33) and (35b) all involve the movement of the sequence Deg A. The same is true of examples (3) in which the adjectives have the property of "comparison" in common (e.g. similar, analogous, different), if we accept Otsuka's (1969) claim that their preposing can be handled in parallel with the preposing in (35). All of these cases, being related to "degree", may be grouped together, and no distinction need be made between the preposing in NP and the movement in S. Then, why is it that adjectives, together with "degree" elements, can be moved? As is shown in sentences (36) below, there is a general condition that an element in the Specifier position cannot be moved alone but must be accompanied with the head

whenever it moves.

(36) a. *Whose did you read book?

b. Whose book did you read?

Therefore, if the target of movement is Deg in the sequence Deg A, it cannot be moved alone but must be accompanied with the head A.¹² Hence an explanation for the movement of adjectives with "degree" elements.

NOTES

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¹ Other adjectives which can be preposed are as follows:

- (i) a. amusing, appropriate, convenient, comfortable, difficult, impossible, pleasant, etc. (easy-type)
- b. quick, prompt, etc. (slow-type)
- c. nice, smart, kind, polite, stupid, splendid, etc. (foolish-type)
- d. beautiful, delicious, heavy, etc. (pretty-type)

See Yasui, Akiyama and Nakamura (1976) for the details of their properties. With regard to likely-type adjectives (e.g. sure, certain, probable), some can be preposed and others cannot. So we will not discuss their preposability in this paper.

² Eager-type, happy-type and able-type adjectives are as follows respectively:

- (i) a. anxious, reluctant, etc.
- b. angry, annoyed, delighted, sorry, indignant, etc.
- c. apt, capable, liable, prone, ready, etc.

See also Yasui, Akiyama and Nakamura (1976) for the details of their properties.

³ Lasnik & Fiengo (1974) claim that adjectives as in (8a) (i.e. the adjectives which take "logical objects"), together with their logical objects, have structures like (9), and that they and their logical objects do not constitute APs.

⁴ The adjective happy does not take a logical object, since John is happy is completely acceptable, unlike John is eager and John is proud.

⁵ Some semantic factor may be involved in selecting the second complement of the verb call. We will not pursue it in this paper.

⁶ Berman (1974) considers the subject of eager (in this case, man) to be an immediate argument.

⁷ One might object that there is a "direct" semantic connection between the NPs and the to-infinitives in the case of adjectives like eager, happy and able, since the understood subjects of the to-infinitives are considered to be controlled by the NPs.

(i) a man eager to go

Such an objection, however, does not seem to be maintained. Adjectives such as eager and happy, unlike adjectives such as easy, slow, foolish and pretty, can take not only to-infinitives but also that-clauses.

- (ii) a. John is eager that his son should enter college.
- b. I am happy that you will join me for dinner.

In (ii), there is no "direct" semantic connection between the subject NPs and the that-clauses. In parallel with (18), eager and happy cannot be separated from their that-clauses in NPs.

- (iii) a. *an eager man that his son should enter college
- b. *a happy man that you will join me for dinner

From this parallelism, it is natural that adjectives like eager and happy, whatever complements or adjuncts they take, should have the same semantic connection with the NPs and the complements or adjuncts, namely, that in (19a, b).

As for able-type adjectives, we assume that be able to is an idiomatic expression and that able and the to-infinitive are tightly connected. Hence the semantic connectedness in (19c).

⁸ Here Comp means a complement or an adjunct that A takes.

⁹ Yoshio Endo (personal communication) pointed out to me that the principle of "semantic connectedness" is involved in the following examples cited from Bolinger (1971: 74).

- (i) a. Will it bleach white the undies?
- b. *Will it paint white the fence?

Bolinger (1971: 74) says, "Bleach and white are synonymous, or represent some kind of cause-effect relationship in which the effect is more or less intrinsic to the cause: to bleach something is to make it white. To paint something, however, does not in any way imply whiteness." Note that, as can be seen from (27), paint and white are semantically connected in some sense, but the connection between them is not so strong as that between bleach and white. Thus, "V NP AP" constructions are divided into three types in terms of the semantic connection between V and AP: (a) bleach NP white-type, (b) paint NP red-type, and (c) eat NP raw-type. In (c) type, raw cannot be moved at all. In (b) type, red can be moved when NP is heavy (cf. (27b)), and cannot be moved when NP is not heavy (cf. (ib)). In (a) type, white can be moved even when NP is not heavy.

¹⁰ See Carlson & Roeper (1980: 142) for more evidence of verbal compounds.

¹¹ We assume that V and AP in (29a) correspond to Comp and NP in (26a) respectively.

¹² Adjectives such as similar and different have the property of "comparison" inherently, and do not have the sequence Deg A syntactically. However, they may be considered to have a sequence parallel to it semantically.

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